



UQ Pro Bono Centre
Pro bono address
Clayton Utz, Riparian Plaza, 71 Eagle St, Brisbane
Wednesday 26 March 2014, 6pm

The Hon Paul de Jersey AC
Chief Justice

Thank you Professor Derrington, ladies and gentlemen...

I have been honoured to be Patron of the UQ Pro Bono Centre, over a period in which the profession's focus on this sort of contribution has intensified. I hope the Centre may consider approaching my successor to take on the role. I am afraid my support has barely surpassed the titular. Nevertheless, tying QPILCH and this initiative to the Office of Chief Justice can be an important acknowledgement of society value of the endeavour.

My perception is that our profession took on a particular reputation for rapacity in the 1970s and 1980s, the "Gordon Gekko" era. That was however also the time we started in earnest to express concern about the inaccessibility of civil justice, the result of the combination of substantial legal fees and costs, on the one hand, and finite individual resources on the other.

It must be said that many lawyers were always prepared to help out others, especially their friends. I recall in my childhood errant youths being paraded for a correctional session with the family solicitor – I expect most often free of charge. I acted in a friend's divorce once – not event for a bottle of Scotch. And I imagine most lawyers will have drafted wills for family members, no doubt with assured skill.

But it was the oxymoron of inaccessible civil "justice" which gave direction and impetus to the modern pro bono movement, now a major genuine commitment for individual practitioners, law students, law firms, government departments, barristers' chambers, corporations and courts. We are not infrequently informed in court proceedings that



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Counsel and solicitors appearing and acting are doing so pro bono, and a substantial additional body of work is resolved in this way without reaching the court.

This is a stark reflection of the public service which should characterize our professionalism. The extent of the pro bono commitment of the profession is not sufficiently well-known and acknowledged, although it has I believe substantially eroded that reputation for rapacity to which I referred at the outset.

The strength of Queensland lawyers' pro bono commitment is annually celebrated by QPILCH's "Walk for Justice", with sister events held in parallel in London and other Australian capital cities. The progressive growth in participation at that event, and in financial contributions to QPILCH's worthy coffers, is very encouraging. QPILCH is itself a great success story, of course, as you may gather from its published on-line data. Its presence at the major courthouses has been very helpful to unrepresented parties in the process, and to the courts.

It is heartening to see the TC Beirne School of Law maintaining and developing the Pro Bono Centre, thereby fostering an early appreciation of the importance of this thrust. I identify three beneficiaries: the altruistic service provider, the recipient of the service, and the legal system generally – which embraces the public. Our people are rightly concerned where the civil justice system their taxes maintains could not accommodate the litigation, in the higher courts especially, of claims brought by persons of ordinary means. We have done our best to increase access by simplifying our processes, and encouraging recourse to ADR, and so on, but it is the "market" controlled legal fees which will ultimately exclude many, so that a lawyer's preparedness to waive those fees will usually be a truly worthy and commendable act.

The leadership of Monica Taylor has importantly lent the Centre strategic direction. It would be good if even more firms were able to take on students, and I think Monica will say something of this later.



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There are, I am told, side benefits. For young lawyers, pro bono work can afford a welcome break from document disclosure in the back room, and they actually get to interact with real people. For the young barrister, pro bono appearances offer an opportunity for court advocacy not otherwise regularly available these days. For students, it involves an invaluable immersion into actual legal practice.

I am honoured to be Patron of this worthy initiative, and I thank and commend all who are associated with it, especially, if I may, our “lawyers of tomorrow”.